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## **Shortgrass Country**

**by Monte Noelke**

Coyote losses in the neighborhood started four months ago. One sly renegade killer hides and bides his time to feast on a lamb's liver and heart and leaves the remainder for the carrion. Professionals and amateurs have failed to stop this elusive quarry. Man is tiring faster, I fear, than the coyote.

The worst part has been the wounded lambs. At weaning, a big-framed ewe lamb trailed along behind the herd, struggling to find her mother and afflicted by a ragged gash that exposed her intestines. Prospects of humane corral euthanasia left a pall of gloom over the morning.

Environmental groups make sense saying they don't feel sorry for the sheepmen. True, coyotes attack children in cities and office workers on parking lots. But we are in no more peril than any other object of grave digging. Coyotes still run from us; canine rabies hosts, be they dogs or prairie wolves, stir up the neighborhood, but not to panic proportions.

Were a beast to become dangerous, like mountain lions are becoming on Indian reservations and near the city of Vancouver, I doubt if a park ranger would have to intervene to protect us.

But controlling one coyote ranging on 40 or 50 square miles of mesquite thickets and cedar ridges defies simple solution. We call the exercises requiring horseback men and rough shod 4-wheel golf carts "renegade rousting." Fifteen miles of sitting on a saddle or chauffeuring a 4-wheeler on a humid 95-degree morning, watching sleek buzzards rise from a fresh killed lamb sharpens the appreciation for shade and relief to the posterior.

On the last rousting held close to the ranch, a newcomer asked what weapons to carry. After a bit of thought, I suggested he pick up a sack of hand grenades from the National Guard to open up right-of-ways to help his old pony through the mesquite jungles on our path.

The next question came over the radio from the spotting crew wanting to know why the cowboys kept riding together. I told him horsemen all developed a magnetic field that pulled them together on a work to talk and prove out the ancient phrase of "riding the same horse." Curing that problem is much harder than capturing the wildest coyote that ever hid her den under a rimrock. A well placed depth charge might scatter riders apart, depending on how accurate the bombardier placed his charge.

Mothers beg their sons to find useful careers but the drug of ranching is too strong to resist. It would've been

easier to kill the ill-fated lamb at the inception of the drive.